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Head Start regional office closure raises local concerns



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FINDLAY — The future is uncertain for Head Start preschool programs in Ohio following the abrupt closure of the agency's regional office.

The Region 5 office, which oversees programs across Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, Indiana,



Although the federal government has said funding will not be affected for individual Head Start programs, Ohio Head Start Association Executive Director Julie Stone said the regional office closures could still affect essential support services for low-income families.

“Direct funding to Ohio Head Start grant recipients is not impacted by this decision, but these cuts have concerning implications for local providers related to issues like grant oversight, program monitoring, and providing training and technical assistance — all essential to ensuring that children and families are able to access reliable, high-quality, and fiscally sound support,” Stone said in a release.

“The work of Head Start providers in Ohio is critical for families as most of these families are working every day to become financially stable and self-supporting,” Stone said. “Head Start and Early Head Start programs provide child-centered, family focused, multi-generational comprehensive community-based services to Ohio’s most vulnerable children and families.”

Officials at Hancock Hardin Wyandot Putnam Community Action Commission, which oversees Hancock County’s Head Start services, worry while local services are still operational, concerns on the long-term impact are growing.



Start currently remains responsive. The Ohio network, led by the Ohio Head Start Association, has been communicating to the Ohio congressional delegation to ensure they understand that any disruption to our ability to provide services will have an immediate impact on families, the workforce, and our community.”

According to a release from Michigan Head Start Association Executive Director Robin Bozek, the Region 5 Head Start office operates under the Office of Head Start, which is a part of the Administration for Children and Families in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The Region 5 office has been tasked with grant oversight and funding distribution, training and technical assistance, and program monitoring and compliance for the schools and programs in its six-state purview. With all staff on leave, some are worried about impacts to grant approval and the processing of applications to make their programs more responsive to local communities.

The Ohio Head Start Association states in a release that more than 28,000 children in all 88 counties in Ohio are enrolled in Early Head Start programs. Roughly 70% of the more than 8,000 Head Start parents are employed with Head Start. With 59 Head Start agencies and more than 700 centers in the state, many families could be left without care if these services no longer existed.

In a 2023 report from the Hancock County Childcare Cooperative, of the 33,000 households in Hancock County, 10% live at or below the poverty line, and 22% are a part of the ALICE program (asset-limited, income-constrained, employed-households). Additionally, the study found a shortage of over 1,000 childcare slots, with the cost of care for a one-child household being an average of \$10,000 per year. For many families, Head Start may be the only affordable option.

